778 Niger after which the reconstitution of the altar is carried on and is
794 equivalent to "the taking on a new soul." Each family member comes to the aid of the party concerned: the father gives copper, the women, peppers, the children, charcoal; a new cowrie is removed from Faro's granary.

778 The mbendyugukã (literally, I am on the enemy) is an individual
794 altar which permits its owner to overcome his adversaries and even to
754 attack their life.

The person who wishes to own one makes it after the death of an enemy. He goes secretly to unearth the corpse, shaves off its hair, cuts off its tongue and nails, and removes the eyes.

An elderly owner of such an altar takes it with him to the person who wishes to make one. The latter prepares and mixes the ingredients according to a special ritual and ties them to a hyena's tail. Before a witness who belongs to his age grade, the elder rubs the new altar on the old one seven times while reciting a prayer to consecrate it; he then returns it to its owner (1).

> 1. Because of its evil powers, the altar may not be made and entrusted to its owner except in the presence of a known witness.

The symbolism of the various parts composing it explain the use to which this altar will later be put. The tongue of the dead man contains his voice and gives to that of the owner the strength to convince those who contradict him in arguments as well as in council meetings. The eyes of the dead man permit him to see what others may not see, or even to blind his enemies by poisoning them with his nails. The hair, evidence of the other parts /134/ of the corpse, contains the nyama of the deceased and is an essential part of the mbendyugukã.

[595] The owner of this altar, which excludes the number four, marries only three wives. Moreover, he cannot mix his own hair with that of another without risking death.

[782] Because of its aggressive character, the mbendyugukã demands victims, dogs or roosters, of red coloring. It gives to whomever owns it a strength which will always be greater than that of his competitors in whatever he may undertake.

778 794 754 For this reason it receives sacrifices at the time when the fields are being worked, for trade, marriage, war, and hunting where the person risks his life; it helps to fight illness and death. Immediately after the first sacrifice, it captures the personality and aggressiveness of the dead man and puts them on its owner, making him doubly dangerous to those with whom he is in conflict. But on the other hand, the danger may turn against him and, to a greater extent than anyone else, he risks his life at the slightest broken taboo.

Furthermore, the Komo who disapproves of such operations may, if he considers it useful, loosen the dead man's nyama on the person who is using his spiritual forces and put him in danger of death. Thus a Bambara will hesitate a long time before owning such an altar; in fact very few individuals assume this heavy responsibility.

C. The Chief's Seat

778 622 In the courtyard of the home of a family head or village chief can be found a pile of wood stuck on the ground and called dyamana tigi jigi (literally, support of the owner of the world) (Fig. 11). This seat symbolizes at once the chief, his power, his social and religious role of supporting the group (1).

1. The seat described below was observed at Banankoroni in the courtyard of the village chief. A similar one is found at Soroba.

The pieces of bent wood which compose it are planted rather deep into the earth above a series of objects. One of these pieces, with a simple bend (in a) is called sinzin, support; the two others, shaped like a T, are called jigi ba jigi (in b) (literally, support of the big support).

FA82 766 The whole lies over the body of an albino (c) buried in a tomb having a ritual form, covered with ancient clothing dyed in wolo and speckled with small black spots made of /135/ bone ash (kolofin), which represent at the same time the embryo in the womb of women and Faro. The head is covered with the cap of primitive men (e).

In (d), three pickets, symbols of man, are stuck through the skin of the albino's forehead; this skin had been removed and seven ritual

562 This suspicion readily degenerates into disrespect, scorn and
778 hatred when a woman [123] is weak -- this being the usual state of affairs. On the contrary, the feeling changes to superstitious fear if she resorts to occult practices and shows herself
[754] an adept at sorcery. Many old women are held to be very expert at such practices.

In the same connection, it should be noted that a new-
851 born child is also subject to scrutiny. For seven days after birth it is not officially taken into the family, because it is thought that during this period the infant may undergo metamorphosis unless closely watched over by its mother.

We shall see, through a study of their institutions, how the Bambara conceive of life and organize it.

Funeral practices will show us how the Bambara regard the idea of death.

And after death?

775 The Romans distinguished among spirits: the manes or
769 good gods (dĭ[1] manes) and the lemurs or evil spirits, both of whom take an interest in the family.

The Bambara have analogous concepts.

Once it has left the body, the soul of a patriarch goes to join the souls of his ancestors, where it finds a spiritual family which protects the earthly family.

The manes (fa su-u) always like to frequent the places where their bodies lived, and that is why one keeps the things that belong to the deceased, why he is buried near his house or sometimes even under the floor, and why some families piously keep the skull of the departed to do it honor.

[778] The entrance-hut (blon') is usually the site of the altar of the ancestors and of the family gods. The ancestral altar may be a small board with a human mask, called kara, or a mound of earth shaped vaguely like a human being. The manes are thought to enter into these objects to receive the offerings and sacrifices made to them.

It is sometimes thought that the world of the manes may be without light and heat but that otherwise they each continue the existence it had in life with the same passions, the same

1 [dei ? —Analyst]

231 825 meaning "goat." In the case of the goat, there remain some customs that are very suggestive. Its milk is the basis of the most solemn of all oaths, that of fraternization; milk is also used to put out fires started by lightning and the hide is used to make sandals worn by widows during the period of mourning. The chronicle tells us that a certain dish made of a goat's head gives rise to the chief's power and sustains it (1). In spite of all

1. See p. 31, in connection with Dina Wara.

this, the goat shares with the donkey a general scorn and they are considered to be the born companions of slaves. This is perhaps why some people refuse to allow either animal to come into the house. Indeed, it is believed that a rich and powerful man can be ruined if either of these animals enters his house or, even worse, if he touches them.

718 791 754 Magician's work. So it is that man is immersed in a strange fluid. In the final analysis, everything, man included, [149] is merely a manifestation of this fluid. Currents and eddies have all forms of life at their mercy, and only the strongest are able to resist, control and even acquire in the struggle greater power than they would otherwise display. "The one who knows" can avoid or follow this chaotic movement; he can control himself and others. He is the real "master" (soma) and he alone can utilize this ever present and ever powerful invisible world.

754 What makes a magician can be described by a single term: the magic weapon, to be used for defense as well as for attack, and indeed for anything else, by one who knows how to use it. Let us consider some of the examples in the Bambara arsenal.

For anyone who wants to destroy an enemy, the so ma sama (lit., "bundle of the person of the house") is a valuable weapon. It is a mysterious powder, kept in the horn of a hind, in which is placed a small stick. It is used in the following manner: let us suppose that a Bambara wishes to harm a person who is passing through the village. The Bambara secretly takes

754 the tiny horn in his hand, grasps the stick, and, after uttering maledictions against the person in question and saying his name, places the stick on his tongue, first lengthwise and then crosswise. After this manipulation in the pattern of a cross, he replaces the stick in the horn. When the traveler returns to his own village, the charm will take effect. If, on arriving, he is so careless as to sit down anywhere but on the bare ground, he will die. If he does sit on the bare ground, he will be safe.

If it is not the traveler whom our man wishes to harm, but someone in the traveler's village, the Bambara, after having gone through the afore-mentioned ritual proceedings against the enemy, will then seek out the traveler and engage him in polite conversation. Just as the traveler is about to take his leave, he will say to him: "Give my regards to So-and-So." When the returned traveler delivers the message, the person receiving it will suffer no harm if he repays in exactly the same way the compliments that have been conveyed to him; however, if he merely says "maraba" (thank you), he will die at once.

The so ma sama belongs to a category of magic weapons, which are especially and deservedly feared and which [150] the Bambara include under the general name, korti. There are endless korti, usually powders made of every imaginable and often repugnant ingredient (snake venom, the dung of wild animals, putrefied entrails from all kinds of corpses, etc.).

[278] Here, for instance, is the procedure used to make su-mugu. A very dry stalk of millet is inserted into the intestine of a dead animal through the anus and is left there long enough for it to become impregnated with the toxins produced by cadavers; it is then withdrawn and thoroughly dried before being pulverized. The resulting powder is kept in horns or boxes, either as it is or mixed with an ointment.

Many of these powders are put into the food or drink to be consumed by the victim. Various methods are employed for this purpose. A ready method is for the harmful powder -- notably su-mugu -- to be placed under a fingernail; then the

754 operator can drop it into the food or drink unobtrusively while serving the victim.

Some of the powders are tossed at the victim with a quick fillip and enter the skin through the tiniest abrasions.

All this is accompanied by the direst curses and constitutes what is known as korti su. These poisons act in various ways, some quickly and others slowly. It is said that the su-mugu only takes effect gradually. Its action is to be seen in a certain amount of swelling of the abdomen, which causes death within a few months.. There is not a single native who is not terrified of the korti, and there are Europeans who have experienced the dangerous effects.

Some korti are not the effect of manipulations but rather of true spirits of evil set in motion by magic practices. The following is an example of the type called donna, which includes also the so ma sama and su-mugu. The symbol or material representation (boli) of this donna is a kind of ball, not very large. In order to use it, the operator places it on the blade of one of the native mattocks called daba. The spell is worked at night. The spirit is attracted by the sacrifice of a chicken and offerings of kola. The operator utters his curses against the people -- often far away -- and asks the spirit [151] to undertake vengeance. If the spirit agrees, a sound is heard which resembles the noise made by the flight of a dung bettle (1).

[825]

1. I have been told that this is the reason for the fear certain Bambara have of this insect.

This is the genie starting off on its mission. He will fatally sting the enemy during sleep and then return, announced by the same noise of flight as was heard on his departure. If the imitator should go to sleep while the spirit is away, he will himself be killed in the same way as the victim. He must stay awake for the spirit's return and again sacrifice chicken and kola to him.

754 The korti are counteracted by the kana, which are de-
755 fensive weapons, more particularly, curative. Based on the same principles and using similar ingredients, they are essentially

754 [755] designed to neutralize the effects of the korti. It was a kana' that father Niany used against the snake bites (2).

2. See above, pp. 157-159.

A third category of magic weapons is that of the siri-kun' or "knots." Though not itself a genie, the siri-kun' is at least dependent on a genie, and it is by addressing a vow or an oath to the genie that one succeeds in obtaining revenge or avoiding the vengeance of another.

As its name would suggest, the siri-kun' is something that binds, that is, something that forces or paralyzes. It receives the obligations undertaken and sworn to by individuals in its presence and it will punish perjury. It renders helpless and paralyzes anyone against whom its intervention has been asked.

I have myself seen Bambara clutching a few bits of straw when they came to me to settle some lawsuit or other. They were following instructions and trying to make me submit to the siri-kun', that is, to paralyze my capacity to take action against them (3).

3. The chronicle of Ségou tells of a similar action by Ngolo against Mamari (see p. 53).

All these dealings in criminal magic are performed in an atmosphere of the most disconcerting trickery and hypocrisy; often the most fawning neighbors are the most to be feared. That is why a Bambara [152] likes to have the assurance of a "powerful protector" (dyigi seme). He seeks him and often thinks that he has found him in the brotherhood of one of those all-powerful genii of which we shall have occasion to speak.

788 Rites. There is no magic without appropriate rites, which must be strictly observed. Any negligence makes the operation useless, even dangerous, for the performer. We saw how the initiator who went to sleep while awaiting the return of the spirit he had invoked was promptly killed by the spirit

788 as it returned to its point of departure. This was presumably because the operator had not done what was necessary to assure the reintegration of the supernatural power.

[778] There are thus rites that set in motion this universal energy, whether diffuse or personified -- rites that channel, direct and orientate this energy so that not only it will reach the goal sought, but also it will be kept from straying from the desired route, thus harming the very person it is supposed to aid. Similar means are used to forestall the misdeeds which may be committed by an agent mistakenly invoked. When Ngolo had aroused his son Ntyi's ambition, he thought he could conjure away its effects by sacrificing his two grandsons, Ntyi's own children.

Those actions that call upon, guide and reintegrate this universal energy, whether diffuse or personified, are what we call rites.

788 754 During the oath using kola, the operator has in his hand a sharp object (pin, thorn, etc.) with which he pricks or stabs through the nut, saying, for instance: "Take my heart and my liver and kill me, if...." (i ka ne son' ni m bien' ta, ni ...). These pricks indicate to the "power" with which the operator is concerned that, if necessary, it should take vengeance by piercing the guilty person, just as the kola is pierced by the pin (1).

1. The shirt sent by Ma-n-son to Forokoro was first pricked with a needle (p. 120).

In curses, all the imprecations used are so many indications, indeed sometimes instructions (2), as to how the [153] spirit invoked is requested to act.

[575] 2. At the time of admission to the brotherhoods, the most frightful threats are made against the traitor or perjuror in the form of curses indicating to the avenging spirit how he should punish: "may it enter through your anus and come out through your mouth, etc."

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789 emanating from the person or object impregnated with magic force acts as if it were a part of that person or object. Often
[788] the magician or [154] ritual officiant spits on the person or object involved in the rites. This is a means of transferring one person's fluid to another.

Conversely, it is vital to know how to avoid contact
751 with, or even emanations from, a maleficent magic force.
789 That is the reason for the great number of mysterious magic
754 practices and the secret of the innumerable amulets that form so many shields, to be placed presumably where they will best protect against any blow. Therefore it is the magician's prerogative to make amulets and to prescribe the conduct necessary to preserve their efficacy.

It should be noted that protection set up against a given person is good only for him and is useless against a successor, for instance. The chronicle tells us that Bani, chief of Samba-Nyana, was successful in using certain artifices to prevent Ma-n-son from conquering him. But, kept in ignorance of Ma-n-son's death and having taken no precautions against Da, Ma-n-son's son and successor, Bani was conquered by Da, against whom his artifices availed nothing.

If one is caught in spite of precautions, what is to be done? Everyone is afflicted in one way or another in any event. A Bambara is always inclined to believe in some sort of supernatural intervention. He has on hand some sort of remedy, but more often he resorts to a "seer" for guidance or, if the case requires, to a magician's skill.

Native medicine is a mass of magic formulas and of remedies strikingly reminiscent of the pharmacopeia of the Middle Ages (see, in the foregoing, father Niany's operations).

[571] The individual does not live as an isolated unit but
789 rather as an integral part of a community. In the society in
783 which he lives, however restricted it may be, he progressively occupies various situations. On both physical and moral levels, he undergoes changes and, depending on circumstances, whether fortunate or unfortunate happenings, changes take place within him. In short, his magic potential varies. These variations are always believed to concern the entire milieu, upon which they may (in the case of illness or death) have disastrous effects.

564 The hunters (donso), who form powerful and feared associations, and the somono [Somono] and bozo [Bozo], who are fishermen, have a less restricted status than the above-mentioned artisans.

The dyeli who has fallen to the level of a domestic factotum is the most scorned of all. He receives some consideration and, in exceptional cases, notable esteem only through his worth as family archivist.

564 The term nyama-ka-la is derived from nyama [221] meaning "ordure" or "outcast," and these people are outcasts. They are scorned. Some are particularly feared: the blacksmiths and the dyeli. The former are reputed, not without cause, to be given to the practice of magic and even sorcery. The dyeli have a fancy for poisoning.

Since persons of caste are free, they may contract marriage, that is, a lawful union, and found families just as free, non-caste persons do. Their male children naturally inherit the father's status which, thus, is handed down indefinitely through the male line.

Ordinarily they intermarry within the caste although sometimes a member of one caste may marry a member of another.

558 564 Any non-caste individual who marries a member of a caste automatically loses status. A woman who does so is henceforth considered to be a person of caste, and her children necessarily have the status of their father. A man is less seriously affected, and it is not at all rare for a man of standing to have a wife of caste. This is indubitably a misalliance; children of such a union are not highly regarded, and this reflects on the father.

564 On the other hand, it is entirely normal and common to have persons of caste among one's friends. There is hardly a person of consequence who does not have several of them as boon companions.

Although the fact of belonging to a caste carries with it a definite status, the caste member is not necessarily expected to practice the traditional trade. A member of the numu caste may very well know nothing whatever about ironwork and may

794 793 bolitigi, the latter have every interest in protecting them, for not only do they pay /38/ their masters annual dues of 80 to 160 cowrie shells, which is little, but they also provide the meats and kola nuts for sacrifices and the d'lo, or beer, for the nocturnal drinking bouts and orgies, and thus are a real godsend.

3. Metamorphosis

776 789 The Negroes say that a djiné or a boli genie can pass from one body into another. Today it may paddle in a pond, be enclosed in a tree, or sit on a rock; tomorrow, if it wishes, it will make its dwelling in a cow's tail, in a horn, in a dirty rag. Whatever its dwelling may be, it is never confined. The Negroes compare these spirits to the wind, to a breath which enters and penetrates into a space through the smallest crack and fills it. Yet they have bodies and are equipped with organs; they drink, eat, and procreate and differ from man only in their tenuity. Since the Negroes are convinced that certain people have become able to master and command the spirits, could they not come to believe that it was possible to attain, like them, a rarefied state? In any case, they do believe in metamorphosis, and it is by entering into an animal or plant, or changing himself into an animal, a plant, etc., that the wicked person succeeds most often in avenging himself, in appeasing his hatred, and even in doing evil for the mere pleasure of doing it.

789 564 754 A good number of sorcerers have this privilege, and sorcerers are not the only ones! Entire castes have the power of metamorphosis; among others the Koulé, who dig out canoes and mend cracked gourds, can all change themselves into hyenas. The sons of the Siri, who are members of the sect dedicated to the boli of this name and are called souba (1) because they commit their crimes during the night, change

1. The name souba is derived from sou ("night") and ba ("great"), ma ("man"), being implied. It means "a man of the great night," "men

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who operate in the depth of night, " but by no means refers to nocturnal sorcerers. Moreover, in the eyes of the Negroes it designates not a bugaboo, but a reality.

themselves into hyenas in order to dig up corpses and eat them, and into gingin ("owl, " "screech owl") to drink the blood of sleeping men and women. It is said that the blood of young girls has an especially exquisite taste, /39/ and when the souba are unable to enter a dwelling in material form to obtain it, they change themselves into such a rarefied breath that they go through the walls and roofs.

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All persons whose faces are disfigured with scars resulting from boils or canker sores are considered victims of a souba, as are those whose legs are rotted by syphilis; evety person infected by erysipelas goes to the members of the Siri sect, the souba.

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In addition to the souba there are the gné-fla (1), men with

1, They are supposed to have the ability to make themselves invisible by means of grisgris hung on their belts. Deprived of these, they are powerless.

two eyes, with second sight, so called because they see the world of invisible beings and know the secret thoughts of men without having to undergo metamorphosis. Some of them are good and some evil; there are those who use their prerogatives to halt the blows of the souba and protect their fellows, and others who use them only to harm their neighbors. As the good as well as the evil can abuse their power, the Negroes keep them all together, and since the souba are almost always gné-fla as well, they are indiscriminately feared and hated.

789

When a person is metamorphosed into something else he keeps his intelligence and his reason, but he is dominated by an instinct, either good or evil, which destroys his will and anesthetizes him.

761 "Koroya do, it is old age," but let us allow them to finish their sentences and continue their thoughts "a ko toun kadi Komo yé, he was beloved by the Komo," -- "à ko toun kadi Kono yé, Nama yé, Douga ye, he was beloved by the Kono, the Nama, the Douga," etc.

761 When people pass by holding a rooster or hen by the feet one
782 may wonder where they are going; if one follows, one finds that they
776 are going to the temple of a fetish, there to sacrifice and to redden their god with blood. "A toun koromé Alla séra à ma, he was old and God came to him," is an expression which is rarely on Bambara lips. When it is heard, it is used with a very special meaning; it signifies that the old man in question was a good man, beloved by all, even by God, but by no means that God killed him. The sacrifices made on this occasion clearly demonstrate this, for they are all directed to a fetish. If God alone were the cause and not the fetishes, the family of the deceased would refrain from all sacrifice; at the very most, it would offer a saraka by order of a sorcerer, but even the saraka offered to God -- and they are offered to Him -- is not a sacrifice, as we shall see later.

761 The priests of a djiné fetish and the owners and priests of a boli
778 fetish have the consolation that they always fall under the blows of the genie which they hold and to which they sacrifice. As for other mortals, 80 times out of 100, and one might say even more without exaggerating, they are killed by a boli fetish. The Komo, Kono, Nia, Nama, and Douga fetishes etc., are the chief murderers, and entire villages are often decimated by them.

761 Although they are able to deliver blows on their own initiative,
578 they are often only intermediaries, the agents of a depraved will to
674 which they have offered their services; almost always there is either a thrown poison, korti, or a poison that is poured, dounkono. Thus
754 sorcerors are consulted at every death; one is sought through their mediation. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is the great maxim for the Bambara as for the Jews, and vengeance must be taken on the one who was able to win over the good graces of a fetish and force it to bring suffering or mourning into the bosom of a family. This vengeance is obtained through the intermediary of a fetish, and

761 therefore secretly, and good relations between the actual /50/ or sup-
578 posed culprit and the unfortunate family are not broken in anyway.
674 The strange fact that has always surprised me is that all these people
754 converse amicably, do each other small favors, invite each other to drink and eat, while in their hatred they maintain a constant guard. They watch each other as they smile -- one party to protect their lives and their interests, the other to obtain vengeance. And on the day when it is least expected, that vengeance explodes inexorably. Cases of poisoning are not unusual in the Sudan, and it is not without reason that almost every death is blamed on the korti and the dounkono. I know that many die a perfectly natural death, and I have seen dropsy brought on by syphilitic consumption stupidly attributed to poisoning by the Komo, acute peritonitis to poisoning by the Kono, dysentery to poisoning by the Nama, undue swelling of the testicles with purulent abscesses, which were consequences of misconduct, to poisoning by the Nia, an abscess in the bladder to the Douga or the Nama. But it is a definite fact which I have noted many times in the course of seven years, and which any European living among the Negores can observe, however little he knows the language, the diseases which kills the natives is contracted when they return from a market, from a festival in honor of a fetish, or from a drinking bout where d'lo flows freely. The person's kidneys are hard and painful, his stomach causes him horrible suffering, his intestines seem to be torn by thorns, and there is complete anuria. In three or four days at the most his time is up.

The administrators at the head of a circle have all had to settle these cases which touch on the question of poisoning, and I doubt if there is one who has seen the matter clearly, so difficult it is to establish poisoning by korti and by dounkono. Let us refrain from throwing a stone at them; in a similar situation we would all be at a loss, for here there are always as many guilty persons as there are innocent, and all of them deserve the rope even while able openly to claim peace, liberty, and life. Since in the eyes of the Negro the fetish alone is guilty, there is a very simple means of stopping the decimation of the population and of allowing it to grow!

000 I pass over and do not dare to give this means: it is too radical, especially in our era; it is not anticlerical; it lacks breadth /51/ of mind. The fetish trees would have to be cut and burned, the boli confiscated, and their priests and owners employed in colonial works. Nor should the sorcerers be forgotten -- these men who spend their lives cheating people and stealing from them, who know only one kind of cultivation, the cultivation of laziness; finally, many schools would have to be opened. Paganism and barbarism would soon come to an end. The missionaries are there, ready to devote themselves, and they would ask no sacrifice from the treasury of the colony to do so; but the missionary has a morality which is too elevated, too noble, to be given to savages.... With what, then, is paganism to be replaced? With Islamism no doubt! Islam soils everything it touches, it abases a man more than it raises him. It is better to let the Negro redden the trees of his bush with blood, for he would gain nothing by the change. Every médersa (1), even that of djenné, is useless,

1. A médersa is an Arab school.

nonsensical, and absurd; Arabic is not spoken in the Sudan, so what good is it to give the natives a language which is neither theirs nor French? Why should we want Islam in the Sudan? The villages are happy, full of zest; let us not try to make them sad and silent, let us not make them Arab villages, where one finds a human lizard on the street corner, lazily hidden in his burnoose and a hoarse dog barking on the walls, and where all the gates are shut. These Arab villages give the feeling of a prison, the chill of the tomb, and there is no liberty there except for vermin and lice.

154 674 If it is difficult to ascertain a poisoning by korti and by dounkona, here is the reason. When a Negro wants to take revenge, he goes to find a sorcerer to whom he confides his plan and gives his reasons. He is more interested in seeing his enemy suffer than in seeing him dead, and if he succeeds in injuring him and his family, harming his body and his possessions, he declares himself satisfied.

Sometimes the sorcerer undertakes the task, but he is cautious, knows how to contrive matters to suit the occasion. He can assume

754 all functions to some degree, and it is to his own advantage to be con-
674 tent, in such an instance, with the position of solicitor; to whoever
/52/ consults him, he indicates a celebrated fetish in the hands of one
of his friends. The Bambara runs there without delay, and the master
of the fetish, generously and heavily paid, takes the god out of its
[778] dirty goatskin. Onto one of its instruments (for a boli is manifold, and
horns of cattle and antelopes, varnished with blood and brownish in
color, are mingled with other objects in the shape of an eggplant, a
turnip, a beetroot, a napkin ring, horse dung, etc., etc.), onto the
sirikoun, which is almost always wrapped in a red shirt front, he ties
firmly with a cotton thread seven straws five to seven centimeters
long. The petitioner explains his visit, names the enemy on whom
he wants to take vengeance, gives the reasons that compel him, and
the master of the fetish recites his formulas, reddens his sirikoun with
blood, and plasters onto its sides some spittle containing chewed kola
nut.

754 If the sacrificial hen dies with spread wings and breast on the
674 ground and if when split in half the kola nut falls with the pulp down
787 and the round side up, the contemplated revenge is put off until later,
for it is believed that the sacrifice has not been accepted. Our
Bambara then goes away, relieved of a hen, two kola nuts, and at
least 160 cauri, but nowise defeated; eight or ten days later he returns
to the charge, unless he is too impatient to wait and consults a new
sorcerer, who gives him orders to appeal to a fetish that shows a greater
interest and has a more enterprising and less timid disposition.

If the hen dies on its side or on its back with its feet in the air,
and if the pieces of kola nut fall on the round side with the pulp on
top, the sacrifice is accepted, and this is the god's answer to the
effect that he is taking his client's side. The enemy is thenceforth
754 placed under the boli a blara boli koro, the sanctioned expression;
674 he is placed under the avenging power of the fetish and is in its hands,
278 and the master of the idol, the sacrificer, and the people in his retinue
plot to make him disappear at once. They undertake the task them-
selves as seldom as possible, however; they prescribe sacrifices and
offerings to the client and give him a deer horn carefully tied up,
telling him how to use it. This deer horn is nothing less than a horn

754 of poison, and the brown powder concealed in it is usually Strophanthus
674 seed /53/ crushed and kneaded into excreta of human corpses and
278 saliva taken from their mouths. This mixture is dried in the shade and then wrapped in a piece of hyena intestine, and to render the effects more immediate and certain, the fetish is brought out and placed on this meal and a sacrifice made. These sacrosanct preparations are made at night, if possible in the first quarter of the moon, and never on a Monday or Thursday, which are days of rest for the boli gods (1).

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1. The boli have two days' leave per week, and the Negroes also take this rest. However, they are broad-minded on this point even though for certain labors they ask the religious chief or a sorcerer to be allowed to work. As a rule a boli may not go out Sunday or Monday night nor on Wednesday or Thursday. They quite often do go out, however, but only by command of the fetish or a sorcerer. To bring out a fetish is to spend the night dancing the dance of the fetish, and when the initiates want to dance they always manage to do so. The boli are also sacrificed to on Monday and Thursday even though they are at rest. In theory there is rest for the fetishes; actually, the idea is loosely applied.

754 To succeed and to keep from displeasing the fetish, who would
674 then abandon your cause and turn against you, you must follow the prescriptions of the priest and members of his council to the letter; the omission of one rite, one sign, one formula, one imprecation, destroys the power of the poison contained in the horn, or at least renders it ineffective. Sometimes this powder is thrown and is called korti sou, and at other times it is poured and is called dounkono di.

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674 The dounkono is administered or poured by sliding a pinch of it under the nail of the middle finger of the left hand and throwing it with a skillfully concealed flick into the food or drink of the enemy. Food sauce, dégé (millet flour mixed with water), millet beer (d'lo), and di kolé (hydromel) are suitable and without doubt easily poisoned.

Throwing poison, korti sou, remains the prerogative of the sorcerers, priests, and masters of the fetishes, and one must be somebody in order to use it (2). As with the dounkono, a pinch is slid

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2. There are many old Bambara who, after a meal with a neighbor or friend, mutter a prayer while washing their hands and make the motion of throwing korti poison. This is a curse which they throw against the enemies of the family that has received them.

under /54/ the nail of the middle finger, and with a strong flick it is thrown onto the enemy or merely toward him or onto an object which has belonged to him, and it is ordered to be effective, to kill him if possible, or at least to reward him with a sickness which he will long remember.

The Bambara fear the korti far more than the dounkono and if an enemy seriously threatens him with it they tremble. For a person so threatened is no longer dealing with a man, a power equal to his own; he must be on guard against an all-powerful god who places his strength and power at the service of the man. The force is submissive and obedient, triumphant and vengeful; it delivers its blows blindly where it is ordered and onto any person against whom it is aroused and against whom it is hurled. That, in my opinion, is the exact translation of the expression, korti sou ma la. As a dog is set on a person (oulou sou ma la), so korti poison is thrown at him (korti sou ma la).

The Negroes say that korti has a crushing effect: when it strikes you, you feel a violent upheaval throughout your body, your limbs stiffen, and you fall backward. You may die of the attack, but

754 usually you come back to life and get off with a fainting spell followed
674 by violent hiccups and vomiting (1). For several days afterwards, and

> 1. Were I not afraid of provoking a smile, I would admit that in February, 1908, having gone to a Da woro, a celebration which takes place six days after circumcision, I was called by the master of the Komo and, when we were alone, he threw korti at me with the usual curses and left. Without doubt emotion as well as the fatigue of the journey and of the previous day had much to do with my reaction, but I immediately felt stomach cramps and held onto the wall so as not to fall. My discomfort lasted from five to ten minutes.

sometimes several months, a malignant fever confines you to your mat, your limbs swell, deep and purulent sores cut into your body, and so you will drag on for months and months, incurable, and a burden to everyone and to yourself.

The korti sometimes strikes you in such an unobtrusive way that you do not feel it entering. You notice it later when sickness comes, and its nature is declared by the sorcerer, that infallible being who is never mistaken. /55/

754 The Negro is almost without defense against the korti. A person
755 poisoned by it must have recourse to a more powerful fetish, and he kills hens and goats in vain, for he seldom finds one. He covers himself with grigris, surrounds himself with talismans, and nothing does any good. Even the two little deer horns hung around his neck remain ineffectual and unable to defend him, holy as may be the powder they contain.

754 Against the dounkono, or poison that is poured into food and
674 drink, a victim not only has recourse to his gods and his grigris, which

754 become detached and fall of their own accord "if they are well made
674 and have lost none of their complete power"; he also has a mass of antidotes. Almost always he escapes with nothing more than a few days on his mat and a good stomach-ache, and although his convalescence may be long and can sometimes go on indefintely, at least he is shown sympathy; he gets a big share in the sacrifices offered by his friends, and his broth improves.

754 If the korti are many and cannot be numbered -- "each fetish
278 has its own" -- the dounkono are still more numerous, for in addition to the fetishes, the sorcerers, elders, men, and women, all know how to prepare a poison and give it whatever strength and power is desired. Every poison produces a special disorder in the body depending on the hand that throws or pours it. When in doubt, the Bambara consult the being who never deceives and cannot be mistaken: the sorcerer! And it is usually he who prescribes the antidote.

754 In the eyes of the Bambara, pouring poison (dounkono di) or
673 throwing it (korti sou) is a blameworthy act, and those who are guilty of it have a dismal reputation among their fellows. One should not be surprised to see this crime remain unpunished, however, for in their eyes it does not bear the same odium as an overt or concealed murder by main force. I might even say, without fear of error, that this way of taking revenge is for them not a crime in the strict sense of the word. They so often have recourse to fetishes to settle a dispute and so readily threaten an enemy with the wrath of the gods, that taking vengeance through their intermediary leaves them calm and without any remorse. Besides, with what reproach should we reproach one who does so? It is true that he is cruel and without pity, /56/ but who gives power to the powder that he pours and the powder that he throws? It is the god, the fetish, and it alone is guilty! So let the enemy obtain the fetish's good graces and ward off its blows by sacrificing, let him set a more powerful god against it.

761 As one can see to the Bambara there is nothing natural about
753 physical and mental suffering and death; there is always an intermediary, and suffering and death are caused by an enemy who is taking vengeance, by a wicked person, by a sorcerer, or by a fetish.

782 alms, an obligatory gift, and consequently a tribute or tax paid to the genii in order to consecrate to them an object, an animal, a person for the purpose of protecting oneself, of avoiding the risk of any disfavor or of receiving a blessing. That is its nature whether it is individual or village-wide, regardless of whether it does or does not involve bloodshed. The Bambara call this kind of offering saraka bo, saraka di (1).

1. Bo, "go out"; di, "give."

782 Saraka are also offered to consecrate an object, an animal, or a
● 754 person to the genii for the purpose of harming a neighbor. There is always a little magic involved in these offerings, and it is not unusual, at a short distance from the corner of land fromed by paths that join or cross, to find on the path a wad of hair, a bit of a horn, a box full of ashes, etc.

The Bambara performs this magic to help the fulfillment of his saraka, his entreaty; he is convinced that if his enemy touches the magic object thus thrown out at random, his vengeance will be more certain, prompt, and drastic. There is more to this symbolic magic: how many times have I seen, at these corners of land where the gnâma (2) stay and the saraka are held, a chicken heart fastened to the

2. Fluids, conscious forces which cause death and sickness. See my chapter on the gnâma.

ground by a bamboo spike! Often someone will crucify a little animal, usually a lizard, on the ground, and a nail will be driven into the part where he wants his enemy to be stricken. For this kind of saraka the Bambara have a standard term, saraka da ma kan (3), ("to make a

3. Saraka, "obligatory alms," "tribute," "tax"; da, "to place," "to put"; ma-kan, "on a man."

saraka against someone").

776 It rarely leaves its tree; it likes its little grove and shady park, and
778 in many places it is satisfied with a stump that is all blackened, worm eaten, rotten, and falling to pieces.

The formula of the sacrifice

782 When one is present at a sacrifice to the dasiri and sees the
781 gnéna-n-sonnaba uncover his head, take off his large blouse, and crouch at the feet of the fetish, one expects something imposing and grand. Nothing of the sort occurs, and one is quite surprised to find so little gravity /120/ in such an important act. People enjoy themselves and chat; the priest, red with blood, tosses off witticisms and coarse jokes, and while feet and wings of the victims -- goats, sheep, and hens -- twitch in the agonies of death, nothing passes from one group to another but bursts of laughter that finally disappear far off at the edge of the grove where the women are.

782 The words in the sacrificial formula vary a little from one village to another, all depending on the volubility of the sacrificer. Nevertheless, it remains basically the same everywhere. After having greeted the fetish in his own name and the name of his subjects, he implores it to forgive them all the insults, offenses, and disrespect toward it, of which they have been guilty, voluntarily or involuntarily, during the entire year. He then calls it by a name related to the type of tree in which it is located -- e.g., ma ziraba ("great baobab man"), ma djala ba ("great false-cedar man"), -- and announces that he is going to sacrifice. While offering the dégé and d'lo, he implores it to protect them against the evils of the sons of the fetish siri, the souba (1), to preserve them from the souya maou (2), the

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1. Sou, "night"; ba, "great." The souba are masters of the night who change themselves into hyenas or owls, dig up corpses, and eat human flesh.

2. Souyaké, "to prowl at night."

778 /152/ at the foot of the tree under which the initiates shouted and
782 danced all night, they are shown the siri found by the djenfa tjéou (1)
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1. Djenfa tjeou; those who run with heads of the Nama.

and the darotigi, or darotala (2). While these siri (3) are burned, the

2. Darotigi, or darotala; he who rings the bell and precedes the djenfa tjéou with a lantern.

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3. The siri are sacred objects which initiates of siri, the souba, throw here and there in the environs of the village in order to cast evil spells and sorcery on persons to whom they wish harm. Every time the Nama is brought out 20 to 40 siri are found. These small amulets /sic/, made of a little of everything, including trouser buttons, hooks, and belt buckles, tremble and moan while the women watch them. I have been present several times at this performance but have never perceived these tremblings and moanings, doubtless because I am not a Negro.

women dance and sing the praises of the idol.

778 The boli have two days of rest a week, Monday and Thursday
782 (4). It is nevertheless permissible to sacrifice to them on these days,

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4. They rest in the sense that a festival at which they preside, e.g., a circumcision, never takes place on those days.

778 The Bambara consult these sorcerers to find out the future and to
791 draw their horoscopes or good luck. The fee for a seance is not at all unreasonable; it seldom exceeds the moderate sum of 40 cowrie shells, or one sou.

Concerning the Sirikoun

778 Every great boli includes an object called sirikoun. There are other sirikoun which are no longer parts of boli, but have become
754 actual boli. The latter are hung at the waist and are always /156/ covered with a red cloth. Almost everyone owns them, although they are most frequently in the hands of the owners and sacrificers of great fetishes. They are usually ends of the tails of cows, horses, wild pigs, etc., and are often sprinkled with blood. They are sought in order to cast a spell or sorcery on an enemy, to make him sick, and even
[151] cause him to die, or again to protect oneself from a spell, sorcery, sickness, or death.

The sirikoun and the talking boli are fetishes belonging to individuals; they have neither festivals nor formal sacrifices, and they are not publically worshipped.

Chapter 8

The First Years in the Life of a Bambara

1. The Sexual Morality of the Bambara

181 Those who have seen the Bambara and have the slightest acquaintance with them will not hesitate to tell you: "They are liars and thieves." They certainly never pass up a chance to take the property of another, and they lie boldly and with such complete calm that not a muscle in their bodies flinches. This has always surprised